

Choosing a designer or architect

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Depending on the size and complexity of your building project, you'll need to decide if a designer or an architect meets your needs.

Choosing a designer or architect is an important stage in any project. Who you get to help you, and the decisions you make now, will determine what and how you build, and the final cost.

You should know:

- if your project is residential and contains restricted building work you must use a licensed building practitioner (LBP) to do or supervise the design work.
- if your project will cost more than \$30,000 (including GST) there are consumer protections about contracts that your designer must fulfil.

To help you design your building or renovation project, you can use:

- registered architects
- architectural designers
- an architectural draughtsperson
- chartered professional engineers (for specific, more complex design)
- builders or a building company who may be able to arrange your drawings and designs
- companies who provide a standard house design package (often referred to as 'group home builders').

Why design work is useful

Good plans, and any drawings or specifications, are key to your build. They are part of your building consent application. You need someone who knows the Building Act and can design to the current Building Code.

In most cases the design of the structure and weathertightness of your home must be carried out or supervised by a designer who is a licensed building practitioner (LBP). Fire safety design in small to medium-sized apartment buildings (including townhouses) also requires an LBP.

Your designs prove to the council how your proposed building will comply with the Building Code. The builder builds to the plans, and everyone who works on your build should also follow them.

At the end of the job, the council checks the work has been done to the consented plans. The plans provide a record of the completed building work, for you and any future owners of the building.

As well as helping you realise your designs into plans, specifications and drawings, some designers take on wider roles (usually on larger projects). This is often formalised in a contract, and if agreed they may:

- assist in selecting your builder and other tradespeople
- apply for a building consent
- monitor the construction process
- discuss building consent variations
- organise inspections
- keep your council informed.

Make sure roles are set out in your contract, so you both have a clear understanding of who's doing what.

Choosing a design professional

You could ask your family and friends for recommendations when it comes to choosing a design professional. It should be someone you can communicate your ideas to, and are able to talk to about:

- your budget
- the type and extent of build you anticipate
- factors that are important to you, such as:
 - open plan
 - solar heating
 - sustainability
 - versatility
 - expectations of fit out (high-end, standard or budget)
 - sunny areas
 - privacy.

Before you meet your shortlist of designers

- have a clear idea of your wants and needs, and separate this from your 'nice to haves'
- think about how you will use the space, both now and for your future requirements
- prepare information about the site (such as the PIM, Project Information Memorandum).

Ask to see examples of their work and how previous projects went, including:

- communication with tradespeople and the homeowner
- whether they met budget expectations
- working with council
- any delays and amendments.

Check at an early stage how the architect or designer expects to be paid. This is typically either:

- an hourly rate
- a percentage of the total building cost
- a fixed fee.

Skills and expertise of design professionals

Architects and designers hold differing qualifications and have varying levels of skill and ability. Choose a designer according to how much help you need deciding what to build, and how complex the job will be. A designer who is an LBP must design any restricted building work.

[Restricted building work \(https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/choosing-the-right-people-for-your-type-of-building-work/use-licensed-people-for-restricted-building-work/restricted-building-work/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/choosing-the-right-people-for-your-type-of-building-work/use-licensed-people-for-restricted-building-work/restricted-building-work/) explained in full.

Architect

An architect will likely have an architectural degree and be registered with the New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB). They must have a practising certificate and meet the requirements of the NZRAB – they cannot do any work as an architect without it.

Members of the NZRAB are automatically considered LBPs in the design class.

Architects will have knowledge of the Building Code and be able to coordinate design with the function of building elements. They may also be experienced in managing the building process.

Architectural designer

An architectural designer will be trained in the technical aspects of design and detailing. They will need to provide you and your builder with designs and full working drawings. You should ask to see some of their previous work. You can arrange for them to manage your building process.

Architectural designers should know the Building Code and be able to meet your local council's requirements. You will need to check if they are an LBP.

Architectural draughtsperson

An architectural draughtsperson will usually have technical institute training. They should be able to draw up plans and instructions to give to your builder or other tradesperson. You will need to check if they are an LBP if your project will involve restricted building work.

Hiring your design professional

[New Zealand Registered Architects Board \(http://www.nzrab.nz/\)](http://www.nzrab.nz/) has a list of all practising architects.

[Architectural Designers New Zealand \(http://www.adnz.org.nz/\)](http://www.adnz.org.nz/) lists most designers and draughtspeople.

[Licensed building practitioners \(http://www.business.govt.nz/lbp/\)](http://www.business.govt.nz/lbp/) has the public register, but does not include NZ Registered Architects or Chartered Professional Engineers as they are automatically deemed to be LBPs.

Keeping on budget

Designers work to the best interest of the design, and not necessarily to the budget. Be clear with your designer at the outset what your budget is, and if meeting it is important for you.

Often the first indication you will have of the actual cost of a design is when tenders come back from prospective builders.

The work involved in pricing labour, materials and incidentals is not usually done by designers in their work. Your designer may recommend you engage a quantity surveyor to check whether their design meets your budget, and this will be an additional cost to you.

If you have a builder in mind for the job, it can be a good idea to involve them at an early stage in the conceptual drawings. This may provide you with a rough idea of cost before you spend money getting the plans and specifications drawn up for building consent and to the level of detail required for tendering.

When you get tenders back, if the sums are considerably over your budget, you should consider revising your plans now. If you have already applied for a building consent, you may have to seek an amendment, and there will be an additional cost. However, making changes during the build can cause delays and incur greater costs.

Your choices at the design stage also determine your budget.

- You may wish to choose innovative or new materials. Weigh up the benefits against factors that might increase costs, such as paying more for a building practitioner able to work with a new cladding type, or whether you will need to pay extra to demonstrate Building Code compliance to councils.
- Budget is in proportion to size (a bigger footprint or more storeys requires a bigger budget).
- Large areas of glazing, large steel spans and bespoke items can all add to costs.
- Groundworks and landscaping are often under-estimated.
- Personal preferences impact on budget – specify if you want high-end, standard or budget fixtures and fittings.

Discussing your project

Once you have chosen your design professional, discuss the finer details of your project and your expectations. This could include:

- reviewing your ideas, visions and desires
- discussing your budget and where savings can be made
- finalising your design professional's role, such as:
 - managing design

- overseeing budgets
- managing the building process
- applying for building consent
- selecting the builder and other contractors
- being involved with inspections
- overseeing the project's completion and final inspection
- whether any landscaping design is required.

Remember your design professional will need information about your build. This includes:

- the certificate of title
- council planning information
- water, drainage and sewer plans.

Signing a contract

It is a good idea to get an agreement in writing regardless of the size or cost of the work. You must have a contract with your design professional if your project will be over \$30,000.

The contract needs clear information about everything the architect or designer will be involved in over the duration of the project. You must make sure the person you choose understands the Building Code as well as your needs and budget.

You should confirm their role in your project, and whether they will be managing the building consent and construction process through to the final inspection. You will need a separate contract with your builder, or other tradesperson.

Make sure you understand the contract you are signing, preferably getting your lawyer to check it before you sign.

[Why contracts are valuable \(https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/why-contracts-are-valuable/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/why-contracts-are-valuable/)



New Zealand Government

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